



Volume 2: Issue 2

May 21, 2004

## West Nile Virus Newsletter

This is the second year of a regular Department of Health (DOH) West Nile virus (WNV) communication tool. This electronic newsletter will be provided routinely throughout the summer to keep our partners informed about WNV in Washington State, as well as information from other areas.

### News Release by Washington Department of Health

May 19, 2004

#### **Watching for West Nile virus: dead bird and mosquito monitoring resumes** *Department of Health launches improved West Nile virus information hotline*

**OLYMPIA** Warmer spring weather and the coming mosquito season has the Department of Health on the lookout for West Nile virus again, working with local health departments to identify mosquitoes, track dead birds, and monitor any human illness across Washington. This season brings mosquito-breeding weather and the threat of mosquito-borne disease, including West Nile virus.

"Last year we did intensive monitoring and we didn't find any evidence of West Nile virus in Washington," said Maryanne Guichard, director of the Department of Health's Office of Environmental Health and Safety. "We are starting our monitoring program up again in hopes of tracking the virus because the disease is often found in dead birds before there are human cases in a state."

Read the entire news release at [http://www.doh.wa.gov/Publicat/2004\\_news/04-056.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Publicat/2004_news/04-056.htm).

### Montana fears bad West Nile virus season

The Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. -- State health officials fear Montana could be in for another bad West Nile virus season. Looking toward North Dakota and South Dakota, "we're worried we're in for another tough year," said health specialist Jim Murphy.

"We kind of look at (the Dakotas) to look at what our experiences might be," said Murphy, who tracks statewide diseases for the state Department of Public Health and Human Services.

North Dakota and South Dakota reported 54 human cases of the virus and two deaths in 2002. Last year, those numbers soared to 1,656 cases and 22 deaths.

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## Update: West Nile Virus Screening of Blood Donations and Transfusion Associated Transmission -- United States, 2003

MMWR Weekly, April 9, 2004 / 53(13); 281-284

In 2002, transfusion-associated transmission (TAT) of WNV infection acquired through blood transfusion marked the emergence of a new threat to the U.S. blood supply. Although mosquito-borne transmission remains the predominant mode of WNV transmission, identification of TAT underscored the need for WNV screening of donated blood.

In June 2003, blood-collection agencies (BCAs) implemented investigational WNV nucleic acid-amplification tests (NATs) to screen all blood donations and identify potentially infectious donations for quarantine and retrieval. This screening was performed on approximately 6 million units during June--December 2003, resulting in the removal of at least 818 viremic blood donations from the blood supply.

This report summarizes the results of blood-donation screening tests conducted during 2003 and describes six cases of WNV TAT that occurred because of transfusion of components containing low levels of virus not detected by the testing algorithm. These data indicate that blood screening for WNV has improved blood safety. However, a small risk of WNV transfusion-associated transmission remains. To address this risk, changes to screening strategies are planned for 2004.

The report continues at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5313a1.htm>.

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## Alexander the Great and West Nile Virus Encephalitis

John S. Marr\* and Charles H. Calisher†

\*Virginia Department of Health, Richmond, Virginia, USA; and Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA

Alexander the Great died in Babylon in 323 BC. His death at age 32 followed a 2-week febrile illness. Speculated causes of death have included poisoning, assassination, and a number of infectious diseases. One incident, mentioned by Plutarch but not considered by previous investigators, may shed light on the cause of Alexander's death. The incident, which occurred as he entered Babylon, involved a flock of ravens exhibiting unusual behavior and subsequently dying at his feet. The inexplicable behavior of ravens is reminiscent of avian illness and death weeks before the first human cases of West Nile virus infection were identified in the United States. We posit that Alexander may have died of West Nile virus encephalitis.

Read the entire article: Marr JS, Calisher CH. Alexander the Great and West Nile virus encephalitis. Emerging Infectious Diseases, December 2003. Available from: URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol9no12/03-0288.htm>

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## West Nile virus questions on the 2004 Survey

Submitted by Denise Laflamme, Washington State Dept. of Health, Office of Environmental Health Assessment

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing state-based telephone survey of randomly selected adults, age 18 and over. The BRFSS is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and is conducted in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam. CDC develops questions and states can include additional questions on the survey. The BRFSS primarily collects data on chronic diseases, injuries, infectious illnesses, and the behavioral factors underlying these conditions.

In 2004, the Washington State Department of Health included five state-added questions on WNV. These questions were modified from questions used previously in a telephone survey conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health. The questions included for Washington State are:

1. During last summer in 2003, did you take any precautions to avoid getting mosquito bites or not?
2. During last summer in 2003, did you do any of the following things to avoid getting mosquito bites? Have you done any of the following:
  - worn long-sleeved shirts or other protective clothing outdoors,
  - replaced or repaired window screens,
  - avoided going outside during the peak mosquito hours of dawn or dusk,
  - removed standing water from spare tires, gutters, bird baths, kiddie pools or other places,
  - used a bug zapper or other device in your yard,
  - avoided activities or areas that would have brought you in contact with mosquitoes,
  - used mosquito repellant on your skin or clothing?
3. If you used a repellant, what type did you use?
4. During the past 12 months, have you seen or read any information in the media about precautions to take to avoid getting the WNV?
5. Where did you hear about these precautions?

Questions 1-3 ask about mosquito precautions taken during 2003. Beginning in July 2004, these questions will be changed to ask about precautions taken during 2004. At least 6000 respondents are expected for the 2004 WNV questions. The data will be available sometime in March 2005.

## WNV Web Resources

Washington State Department of Health [www.doh.wa.gov/wnv](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv)

Center for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/>

Washington State University Cooperative Extension <http://wnv.wsu.edu/>

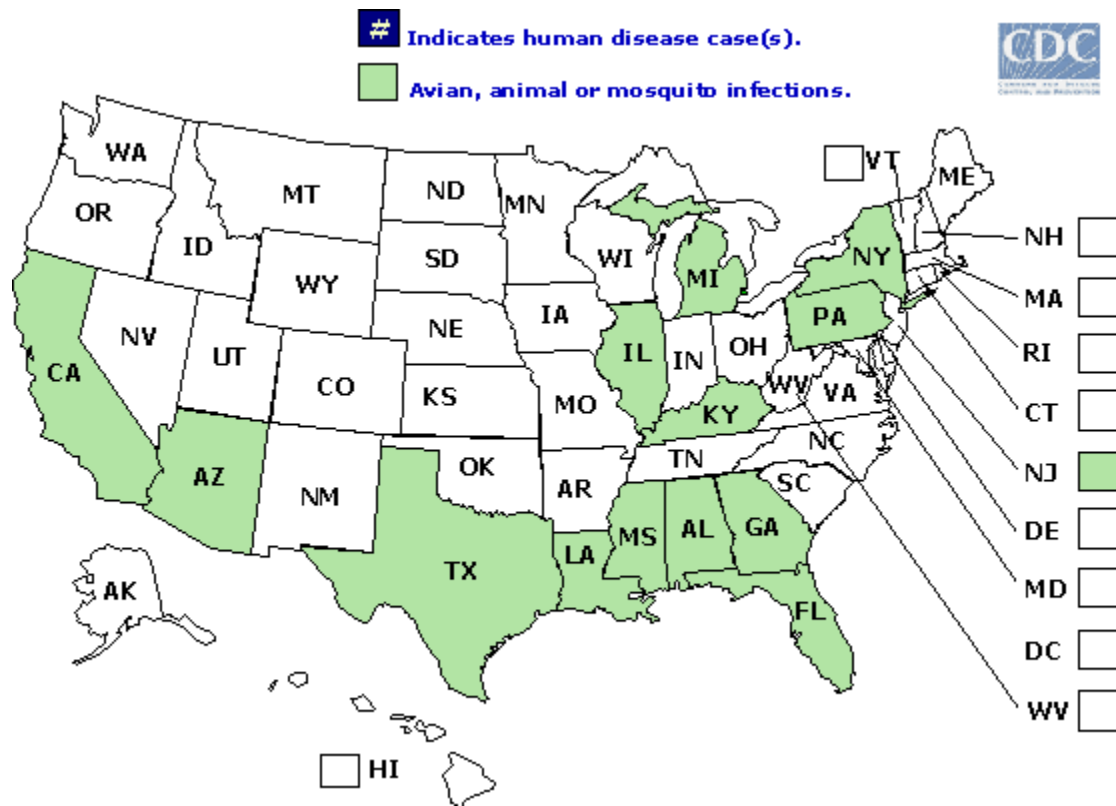
Cornell University, Center for Environment <http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/erap/WNV>

Washington State Department of Agriculture

<http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/AnimalHealth/Diseases/WestNileVirus/default.htm>

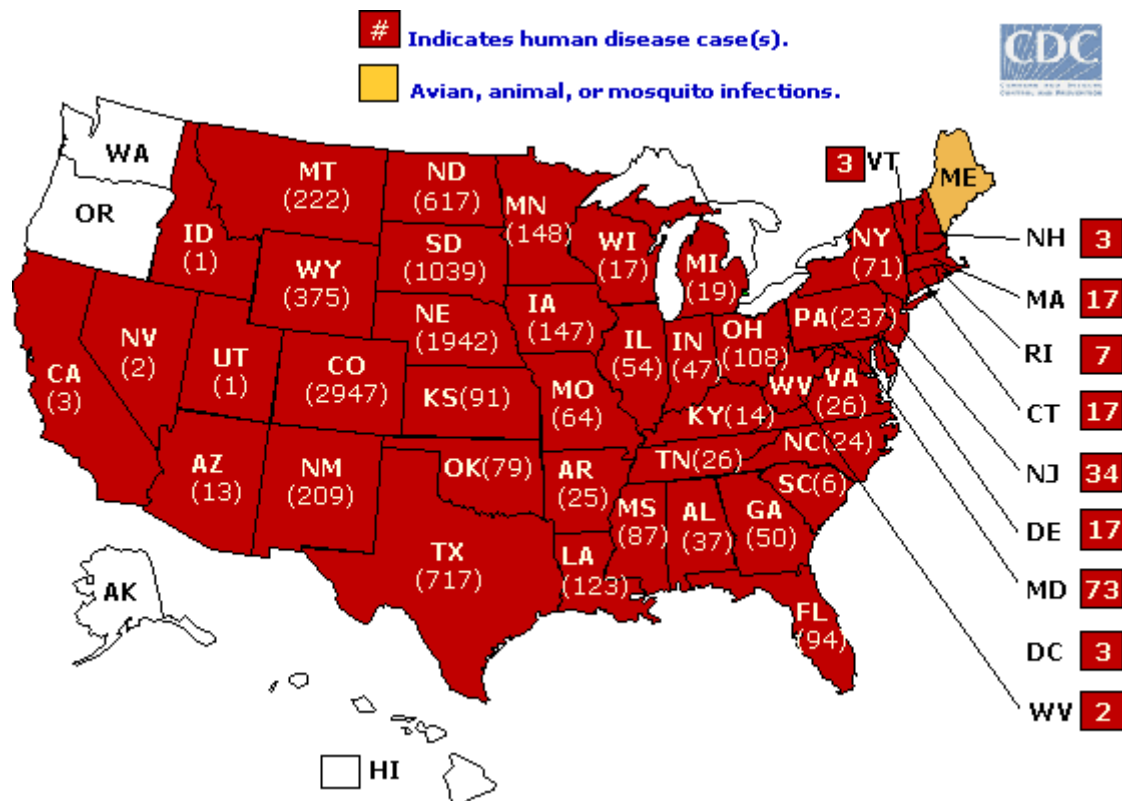
## National Surveillance News

### 2004 West Nile Virus Activity in the United States (reported to CDC as of May 19, 2004)



## 2003 West Nile Virus Disease

**These figures represent final numbers for 2003.**



A further breakdown of cases can be found at

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/surv&controlCaseCount03\\_detailed.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/surv&controlCaseCount03_detailed.htm).

### Article Submission

We are interested in receiving articles for future publications of the WNV newsletter. Please submit articles to Tom Gibbs, [tom.gibbs@doh.wa.gov](mailto:tom.gibbs@doh.wa.gov).

### Community Comments

Let us hear your comments on this newsletter, your needs, or things you would like to see, by sending them to Maryanne Guichard, (360) 236-3391 or [maryanne.guichard@doh.wa.gov](mailto:maryanne.guichard@doh.wa.gov).

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## DOH Contact List for West Nile Virus

### **General Public Toll-Free Hotline 1-866-78VIRUS**

#### **Publications: Brochures/Response Plan/Fact Sheets**

Laura Harper, (360) 236-3380, or [laura.harper@doh.wa.gov](mailto:laura.harper@doh.wa.gov).

#### **Surveillance: Mosquito**

Jo Marie Brauner, (360) 236-3064, or [jomarie.brauner@doh.wa.gov](mailto:jomarie.brauner@doh.wa.gov).

#### **Surveillance: Dead bird surveillance, horses, case reporting, laboratory assistance, and general WNV response**

Tom Gibbs, (360) 236-3060, or [tom.gibbs@doh.wa.gov](mailto:tom.gibbs@doh.wa.gov).

#### **NPDES: Training, technical assistance**

Ben Hamilton, (360) 236-3364, or [benjamin.hamilton@doh.wa.gov](mailto:benjamin.hamilton@doh.wa.gov).

#### **WNV in Humans: Clinical information, case reporting, and laboratory testing**

Call your local health jurisdiction or DOH Communicable Disease Epidemiology, (206) 361-2914 or (877) 539-4344.

#### **Assistance with news releases and media response**

Donn Moyer, (360) 236-4076, or [donn.moyer@doh.wa.gov](mailto:donn.moyer@doh.wa.gov).

Tim Church, (360) 236-4077, or [tim.church@doh.wa.gov](mailto:tim.church@doh.wa.gov).

#### **WNV Program Management**

Maryanne Guichard, (360) 236-3391, or [maryanne.guichard@doh.wa.gov](mailto:maryanne.guichard@doh.wa.gov).

#### **WNV Coordinator**

Tom Gibbs, (360) 236-3060, or [tom.gibbs@doh.wa.gov](mailto:tom.gibbs@doh.wa.gov).

#### **To subscribe to this newsletter**

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